

SUZUKI PIANO BASICS FOUNDATION NEWS

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To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka.

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News

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I Hate to Practice!

By Dr. Haruko Kataoka

No piano student likes to practice very much. Actually, there is no child in the entire world who likes practicing. They all wonder why they have to do it. Parents all wish that their child would start practicing on his or her own, if even just once. Among various unpleasant types of piano practice, the one which is most hated by students is having to repeat short sections with one hand hundreds of times.

All children tend to play piano pieces from beginning to end, laboriously, with hands together unless a teacher is teaching them exactly how to practice. Long ago I was the same way as a child. When I was told to practice, I too just played my pieces over and over with hands together. Because my teacher had not shown me how to practice, I spent only short amounts of time practicing in short sections, and this only when I was just learning a new piece. But at least when playing hands together, whether the performance is any good or not, one can at least enjoy the

wonderful music and harmony of the piece. It is very different from enduring the monotonous work of repeating a single phrase over and over. Yes, truly, all children hate to practice!

However, without exception, they all love music!

Human beings have their Left Brain for knowledge and the Right Brain for sensibility. In recent times, academic education, coupled with the overflow of information in our daily lives, takes care of our need for knowledge without any extra effort. For the Right Brain, however, since our body must learn through feeling, we need repetition and practice regardless of how intelligent we may be. It is said in Japan that the child's music lesson should begin on the sixth day of the sixth month in the child's sixth year. Dr. Suzuki said that waiting until age six is too late. Education of a child should start when the baby is still in the mother's womb.

Therefore, when a child starts studying piano he or she must make a habit of doing the unpleasant practice of small sections from the very beginning. Effort put into doing this will become immeasurably useful tools for the child's life. One can obtain the basic of the basics only with the correct repetition of the simplest element. These basics include the abilities of patience, effort, concentration, etc.

Throughout my long teaching career I have witnessed so many children who have been brought up in different ways. These can be divided into two groups.

In the first group there is a strong-minded mother [*or father, ed.*] who supervises the children's practice and understands what the teacher is teaching during the lesson. She makes her child practice every day, strictly adhering to what the teacher has asked, with patience. This child is lucky. The small child does not have a desire to choose, either a good or a bad way. That is why the child needs an adult who has a desire to choose a good way.

But children who were obedient in the beginning, start to get rebellious when they get a little older. By the time they are in late elementary school or junior high school they begin to refuse to let parents help them practice. They no longer listen to you, and they refuse to practice any longer in reaction to having been obedient since the age of three. However, interestingly they do not want to stop taking piano lessons either, because they like music by then. When this happens, the teacher should understand the student's situation and keep giving enjoyable lessons to them no matter how little they practice. It is now the adults, parents and teachers, who must have patience. If we continue patiently to try getting along with them, they start practicing again, suddenly from their own desire, as they reach high school or college.

It is at this time that the basics, which have been accumulated with the help of parents in early childhood, make piano playing truly enjoyable. If a student has solid basics, even after a period of time with no practice at all, playing difficult pieces with ease is possible. Whenever I witness this phenomenon it makes me so very happy. And the mother who made the effort for her child is happy also.

The second group of children have parents who are so busy with their own work that they cannot supervise adequate practice. Teachers must go slowly in such cases. Parents in this situation should not be hurried when they absolutely cannot find time for practice, even if you think they are lazy. The teacher should not give a lukewarm lesson because the student has not practiced. The teacher should teach every student important basics with great care.

It is all right even if the student does not move forward. Encourage the child that their time will come. Please make it a habit for the child to play the piano even if the parents are never at home. Make an effort to have the children listen to recordings. Create opportunities for the child to perform on the stage several times during the year. Interestingly, even though children hate to practice, they like concerts for various reasons. I think they like the sense of achievement when they perform well.

Although they all come from different home environments, children grow up and identify with music. At the same time they have developed patience, effort and concentration through their unpleasant practice. The practice is painful. It is natural for children to hate it. It is not necessary for them to like it. However, adults have to make the child do distasteful practice with love and effort to raise that child to become a fine adult.

Translated by Ken Matsuda
Edited by Dr. Karen Hagberg
Hard Copy Cartoons Illustrated by Juli Kataoka
From **Matsumoto Piano Newsletter**
Volume 10, Number 8, 2000

Children Are Their Environment

By Dr. Haruko Kataoka

At our next 10-Piano Concert, we decided that little "R-chan," who is just two years and eleven months old, would be a bower. So her mother started teaching her the bow at home.

This child has an older sister in high school who studies piano. At her recent solo piano performance, this older sister had an exquisite bow. She stood calmly, holding her hands in front of her and simply lowered her head gracefully.

Surprisingly, when her mother bowed with R-chan the little girl immediately held her hands in front of her and bowed exactly like her sister.

The older girl never practiced her bow at home. The only time R-chan saw her bow was at recitals. During these performances, R-chan has been naturally a lively toddler, quite unable to sit quietly, and seemingly inattentive to what was going on.

Every time I hear stories like this, I am moved. Children are so wonderful that they take in, in the blink of an eye, everything around them.

All children absorb their environment so thoroughly and completely, that they therefore become the result of their environment.

Translated by Chisa Aoki
Edited by Dr. Karen Hagberg
From **Matsumoto Piano Newsletter**
Volume 10, Number 9, 2000

Piano Basics Foundation Welcomes New Members

Christine Mathews, 1312A Elder Ave., Chesapeake, VA 23325, 757-424-2912

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Happy Summer!

Impressions From Louisville

Reflections

JoAnne Westerheide
St. Louis, Missouri

For 10 years I've traveled to Louisville to observe Kataoka Sensei train and nurture students and teachers. Watching students' ability progress from year-to-year has been a joy. About four years ago a large leap in ability occurred. Sensei was pleased.

Each year my own struggle to improve continues. Periodically, a breakthrough occurs and a depth of tone is discovered, an aspect of natural technique is acquired. How welcome these are. How they encourage continuing the journey and get me through the times when it is tempting to "*throw in the towel*."

I was struck most this time by the following points in Sensei's lessons:

- **When performing, energy is most important. This does not mean roughness.**
- **It is very important to let music breathe. If done correctly, the diaphragm and finger breathe together.**
- **When arm weight is not on the finger, but carried, you can change the sound immediately.**
- **We must always ask students to LISTEN.**
- **Watch Maurizio Pollini's thumb. It is perfect.**
- **If a student is not improving, the teacher must change their way of teaching.**
- **Always research how to relax. Relaxation of the body is reflected in the softness of the hands.**

Most of all thank you, Kataoka Sensei, for traveling halfway around the world to spread the message that all can learn and for never giving up on us (and on me in particular).

Our Time in Louisville
Elena Fettig (Mother) and Michelle (6)
Tempe, Arizona

The opportunity to come to Louisville University Suzuki Summer program has been a wonderful experience for both students and parents. I know our daughter will carry with her all her life the things she learned and the memory of new friends she has made. We, as parents have learned how to be better parents of piano students. The instructors I observed were all enthusiastic and professional. The best part is that it doesn't get to 109° in Kentucky in June!

Our First Experience at a Suzuki Institute
Sheila Majia (Mother) and Brett (5)
Phoenix, Arizona

This is our first experience with a Suzuki workshop. I think it has been a wonderful experience for both Brett and myself. We value the skills of Brett's home teacher (Vicki Merley) and have learned so much from her. This shows in the progress that Brett has made so far. Attendance at this workshop has allowed us the opportunity to gain more exposure to the Suzuki program. With the opportunity to meet other parents, students, and teachers, we now have an even better understanding of the teaching methods and the values they instill. We plan to attend future workshops.

For Brett, the opportunity to have a lesson with Dr. Kataoka was an enriching experience. He understood the privilege he was given and is proud to have received this opportunity. As Brett's mother, I felt honored that he was given this chance. He took the experience seriously and learned much from it.

"We now have an even better understanding of the teaching methods and the values they instill."

Impressions from Louisville
Melody Diehl (Teacher)
Chesapeake, Virginia

I have just attended a wonderful but intense week of study at the Louisville Piano Institute with Dr. Kataoka. As I sit and reflect on what I have learned, I am amazed at the process of learning and what a wonderful journey this has been; I am thankful that I continue to grow and learn as a Suzuki piano teacher. Some of the things I finally grasped this week have been right in front of me; I have noticed that, as we go along on this journey, we receive the teaching and instruction, as we are ready to receive it. When I discovered and decided to embrace the Suzuki Method, I had many new techniques to learn because I grew up as a non- Suzuki student and then had further training as a non-Suzuki teacher.

This summer I had my 7th lesson with Dr. Kataoka and now more than ever, I appreciate and understand where she has been leading me. As teachers, we are all at different places in this journey. Some are ready to receive her teaching more readily than others. In the words of a Zen teacher, "When the student is ready the teacher will appear."

The many concepts such as the importance of listening, hand separate study, correct posture, balance (getting that bench and footstool at just the correct position!), the concentration it takes to get ready, the importance that real study begins after the piece is memorized, practicing only small sections with many repetitions, moving the thumb sideways, and many more are all necessary parts of this tried and true process.

Being involved with teaching children to make beautiful music is an incredibly awesome experience. I know personally I have not fully understood all of Dr. Kataoka's teaching, but with a willing desire, I have continued on this journey, and now this year her teaching is clearer than ever.

I write this because I want to encourage all Suzuki Piano teachers who have been on this journey for many years and those who are just beginning to "stay the course." Continue with your study and research. The camaraderie we have as Suzuki teachers is hard to describe. The encouragement and support I have received this week have inspired me with fresh new energy to continue on this journey. To be involved in young peoples' lives in such a nurturing, positive way is such a high calling.

Thank you Dr. Kataoka for your wisdom, intuitiveness, and patience with all of us who are learning to carry on the legacy of Dr. Suzuki. Being a part of the Suzuki Method through my study and teaching, I learn more and more about myself. May we all continue on this wonderful life-changing journey!

First Impressions

Tina Bernabo
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I was very excited to be able to attend my first institute with Dr. Kataoka and her associates! The most striking impression for me has been the warmth, sensitivity and extreme dedication that Sensei exudes. It is obvious that she loves to share her knowledge with us all; her generosity is limitless. These attributes have shown me most how to be a fine teacher.

Impressions from Louisville

Vicki Merley
Mesa, Arizona

I was a little nervous about my students playing on the recitals, and especially my student playing for Dr. Kataoka. We have all worked on the basics, but they both had been gone a lot last month and I couldn't do much about that. They had other family plans, and my plans for extra work and lessons went by the wayside! They came as they were, and we all got a lot out of the lessons and classes anyway. So, I'm saying that even if we weren't perfectly prepared, we benefited a great deal from the master class lessons. I'm not going there for anyone to give me a certificate about how great my teaching or playing is and I'm not going there for any personal gain in the organization. I'm going there to study, and learn how to help my students and myself play better.

Dr. Kataoka is tireless, and is such a good example of improving yourself---no matter how you play you can learn something more. I liked the statement that as teachers we have to change ourselves, to help our students change. That is a difficult thing. Going to the workshop and getting instruction from her can be painful to the ego---it's not easy to accept correction, when we know we are musicians. But, she was tactful, and kind and 'right on' for what I needed to know about my own playing.

**Thank You,
Kataoka Sensei!**

Sacramento 10-Piano Concert

**Friday, August 17, 2001, 7:30 p.m.
Sacramento Community Center**

This is the second 10-Piano Concert hosted by the Sacramento area teachers and parents. One hundred-seventeen students from six local teachers will be joined by eighty students from around the United States and Japan to rehearse together. Three days before the concert, twenty-nine students from five Orange County teachers (in three pre-rehearsed groups) will join us on stage.

Rehearsal Schedule

August 4 - 12

Rehearsals will be held in Room 143 of the Music Building on the California State University campus, 6000 J Street.

August 14 - 17

Rehearsals will be on stage at the Sacramento Community Center Theater, 1301 L Street.

I would like to take this time to encourage every one who has studied with Dr. Kataoka and is interested in improving their teaching to join us. This is a great opportunity for teachers to learn.

This is not a "festival" of students getting together for fun. We are here to learn how to bring the students to a higher level. Dr. Kataoka will demonstrate through her rehearsing of the groups exactly how to work with the students to bring them to a higher level of ability. American and Japanese teachers as well, will be conducting the students during the rehearsals.

The best learning situation for teachers is attending the rehearsals for the full two weeks. The process of observing the rehearsals from the beginning to the final concert, following the student's progress and wondering if they will actually get it together is fascinating!

After attending the Louisville and Orange County workshops with Dr. Kataoka. I realize the importance of the 10-Piano Concert. I want to do everything possible to encourage anyone interested to come to Sacramento and study together under Dr. Kataoka's teaching.

If you can come I will do my best to find families to host you. There are also hotels available.

E-mail me for more information at: LGNAK@quiknet.com or call 916-422-2952.

Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors, Is there any information, direction or assistance for the BRAND NEW parent to Suzuki Piano??

I have a child interested in learning the piano/keyboard and have been put in touch with a Suzuki Piano instructor. My husband and I, however, are not musically inclined. We have an appreciation for music and strive to have music a part of our children's lives.

Beginning this whole process seems a little daunting, especially the active parental role. While we want to be a part of this, I am wondering if our lack of a musical background will provide a hindrance to our child? Is there any assistance out there for parents such as us?

Sincerely, Mrs. Sam Watson

Reply: Most Suzuki Piano teachers will tell you that a music background on your part is not a requirement for being a really good Suzuki parent. What is required is that you really want your child to have the music that you never had yourselves, and a commitment to helping the child get it on a daily basis for many years.

We teachers spend at least half of the time during your child's lessons explaining how you can best help at home. The important thing for you to do is to listen carefully to your teacher's instruction and to do your best to carry it out. When you have questions, please ask. The teacher knows that your help is the only way that the child can succeed and will do everything possible to give you the information and the strategies necessary to carry out effective practice.

Keep in mind that your job is to help the child develop an ability to practice effectively. This involves repeating small sections, hands alone. If you need more direction with this, please ask your teacher. You will be developing

the skills of concentration, effort and patience, skills that will serve your child well in all kinds of situations throughout life.

If you realize that piano takes many years (at least 10 years) to learn, and if you have the patience and desire to make it happen, you are the best possible Suzuki parent. You can start by making sure that the recording is played constantly in your home, very quietly but constantly. Decide now that you will take every opportunity to expose your child to piano activities and to bring the child to recommended concerts whenever they happen. Be the crucial link between your child and an environment rich in music. Practice faithfully on a daily basis, even if the time is short. The musical details will take care of themselves. Many of the most successful Suzuki parents have had no music background. Try hard for the sake of your child!

PBF Website address: <http://core.ecu.edu/hist/wilburnk/suzukipianobasics/>

[Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation Catalog of Educational Materials: Discography and Suzuki Piano Repertoire](#)

Please send corrections to [Kenneth Wilburn](#), Web Editor for **Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News**.

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